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PROGRESS OF REGIONAL RESEARCH LABORATORIES OCT 3 1939 ★

An interview between Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Chief of Radio Service and Dr. Henry G. Knight, Chief of Bureau of Agricultural Chemistry and Engineering, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, Wednesday, September 6, 1939.

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KADDERLY:

In the spring of 1938 Congress authorized the Department of Agriculture to establish four new regional research laboratories to develop new industrial uses for farm products. The Department immediately launched an intensive survey to determine the location of these new laboratories. The middle of last December, these locations were announced. At that time we introduced to you--in this program--the four newly-appointed directors---and told you what the laboratories plan to do.....That was nine months ago.....Since then--Well, let's ask Dr. Henry G. Knight what progress has been made. Dr. Knight is chief of the Bureau of Agricultural Chemistry and Engineering---and will administer these laboratories.

Dr. Knight---first of all---we must have buildings in which to house equipment and research workers. How is work on the laboratory buildings themselves coming along?

KNIGHT:

In fine shape.

Briefly, we got our go-ahead signal December 14. In three and a half months, we had plans and specifications ready---a job that ordinarily takes a year.....Then, by mid-June, all contracts had been let....By July 1, dirt was flying. And we expect the buildings to be ready to occupy by next summer or fall.

KADDERLY:

That's very encouraging.

Now, Dr. Knight, the thing we're especially interested in is the work that will be done inside those laboratories....I wonder if you would take us on a quick swing of the four "labs" for a word about progress on plans for the research problems to be tackled.

KNIGHT:

Well, Kadderly, that's a large order but I'll be glad to give you what facts I can.

KADDERLY:

No one could ask for more! Let's start at the Eastern Laboratory at Philadelphia and work west and south. At the Philadelphia laboratory the research projects to be emphasized include tobacco, apples, Irish potatoes, vegetables, and milk products.

What progress so far on plans?

KNIGHT:

A project dealing with carbohydrates---mainly milk sugar and potato starch---is the only one we've announced publicly.....Just as a hint as to an important aim under this project---I might explain that we think there are opportunities to develop wider outlets for byproducts of our cheese factories and creameries---outlets that would increase the value of the dairyman's raw milk.....The man to head the carbohydrate work at Philadelphia is Dr. Lee T. Smith, formerly of the Bureau of Dairy Industry.

KADDERLY:

All right. Now westward to the Northern Laboratory in the heart of the corn country; namely, Peoria, Illinois. Products scheduled for first attention at Peoria include corn, wheat, and farm wastes.

What headway so far?

KNIGHT:

I think there are two developments so far at Peoria of wide, general interest.

One has to do with motor fuel---a product that we think holds striking possibilities as a future outlet for farm surpluses, especially of corn.....To head this fuel work, we named ANOTHER Dr. Smith--- Dr. DAVID E. Smith; he comes to us from the University of Buffalo with wide experience in the Government, private industry, and the colleges.

The other development concerns the opportunity to add to the cash income of a large group of farmers through the manufacture of a variety of products from stalks, straw, hulls, and cobs, and other so-called farm waste. We picked to head the farm waste work---Dr. Elbert C. Lathrop---a man with years of experience in the Department and large industrial concerns.

KADDERLY:

With that glimpse of plans for the northern region, let's move due south to the cotton country---to the Southern Laboratory at New Orleans. Here, of course, we'd expect to find you concentrating on cotton in the search for new industrial uses for farm products.....Cotton, and what else, Dr. Knight?

KNIGHT:

Cotton---and sweetpotatoes and peanuts.

KADDERLY:

And what news of plans to date?

KNIGHT:

Well, on cotton, one of several important aims is to extend the use of the cotton fiber itself; for example, to cut manufacturing costs so cotton can compete better with other materials. We recently announced a project on this problem---and named as leader, Robert J. Cheatham---a man with textile mill and teaching experience, who has been with the Department many years.

KADDERLY:

Now, from New Orleans to our final stop at the Western Laboratory at San Francisco.

KNIGHT:

At San Francisco, we start with fruits and vegetables---and alfalfa, wheat, and Irish potatoes.

In one project set up for San Francisco, we will try to find ways to use the waste left over in processing farm crops, mainly fruits and vegetables. To head that work, we've selected Dr. H. D. Lightbody, formerly with the Food and Drug Administration.

I think that about completes major developments in plans for the laboratories that we are ready to announce so far.

KADDERLY:

But, you'll announce more projects from time to time.

KNIGHT:

Yes, by the time the buildings are finished next summer or fall, we will have our plans made---and key men picked---ready to start work.

KADDERLY:

Now, Dr. Knight, as plans go forward on the new laboratories, would you give us briefly your idea of the possibilities in this search for new industrial uses for farmer products?

KNIGHT:

I think this new, enlarge program will hasten the development of new uses---uses such as our chemists developed in making pectin for jams and jellies from cull citrus fruits---and by making furfural for the oil industry from oat hulls.....I also think that the pilot plants to be set up at each laboratory to make (on a semi-commercial scale) the products the scientists develop will help solve more quickly engineering and economic problems---problems that must be solved to pave the way for commercial manufacture of the products. At the same time, I would caution that research does not often yield quick results. And I would remind our listeners that the development of new industrial uses is only ONE of SEVERAL methods needed to deal with the farm surplus problem.

KADDERLY:

Thanks, very much, Dr. Knight for this review of progress with the four new regional laboratories to search for new ways to use farm products in industry. We'll look forward to hearing more about progress in the near future.
